

Office of Attorney General Terry Goddard



STATE OF ARIZONA
DEPARTMENT OF LAW
1275 W. WASHINGTON STREET
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007-2926
WWW.AZAG.GOV

ANDREA M. ESQUER
PRESS SECRETARY
PHONE: (602) 542-8019
CELL PHONE: (602) 725-2200

Terry Goddard Announces Indictments in Massive Human Smuggling Case

(Phoenix, Ariz. – March 29, 2007) Attorney General Terry Goddard today announced the indictment of 16 defendants in the breakup of one of the largest human smuggling operations in the state's history.

A year-long investigation by the Arizona Financial Crimes Task Force found evidence that six travel agencies in the Valley provided one-way airline tickets to more than 6,800 undocumented immigrants since August 2005 when Arizona's human smuggling statute took effect. All of the tickets, worth a total of nearly \$2 million, were for travel from McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas, where immigration security was known to be less rigorous than at Sky Harbor Airport in Phoenix.

The defendants include 14 people who were owners, managers or employees of the six travel agencies. The two others indicted are alleged to have operated a drop house in Phoenix where illegal immigrants stayed before being driven to Las Vegas for their flights. The investigation is ongoing, and additional indictments are possible.

"This case underscores our increased commitment to investigate and prosecute human smuggling in Arizona," Goddard said. "It also reflects the excellent cooperation of our law enforcement partners in the Financial Crimes Task Force."

The investigation involved work by the Arizona Attorney General's Office, the Arizona Department of Public Safety and the Phoenix Police Department.

Charges against the defendants include smuggling human beings for profit, money laundering, participating in or assisting in a criminal syndicate, conspiracy and racketeering. All are felonies.

"The teamwork involved in this case is another example of the positive results that can be obtained when law enforcement agencies work together," said Jack Harris, Phoenix Public Safety Manager.

The six travel agencies are:

- Acapulco Travel and Tour, 4344 W. Indian School Road, Phoenix.
- Apricus Travel, 4041 E. Thomas Road, Phoenix.
- Marina Tours, 7035 S. Central Avenue, Phoenix, and 535 E. Southern Avenue, Mesa.
- Mundo Travel, 3620 E. Thomas Road, Phoenix.
- Planet Travel, 5233 S. Central Avenue, Phoenix.
- Toronto's Travel, 7579 E. Main Street, Scottsdale.

The investigation began in February 2006 when detectives investigating money transfers at a Western Union store were led to a Phoenix house where they found 30 undocumented immigrants, along with airline tickets and travel itineraries. During the investigation that followed, undercover agents posed as coyotes and purchased \$30,000 worth of airline tickets for illegal immigrants from the suspected travel agencies. All the airline tickets were purchased with cash in Phoenix for one-way travel from McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas.

Assisting in the investigation were the Airlines Reporting Corporation (ARC), based in Arlington, Va., and the following airlines: Southwest Airlines, America West/US Airways, United Airlines, Air Tran, American Airlines, Jet Blue Airlines, Delta Airlines, Alaska Airlines, Frontier Airlines, Continental Airlines and Northwest Airlines.

The defendants connected with the travel agencies are:

Nicholas Toronto, 44, of Scottsdale, charged with one count of fraudulent schemes and artifices, one count of illegally conducting an enterprise, one count of money laundering and two counts of smuggling of human beings.

Matthew David Landavazo, 45, of Phoenix, charged with one count of fraudulent schemes and artifices, one count of illegally conducting an enterprise, one count of money laundering and two counts of smuggling of human beings.

Antonio Verbera, 54, of Mesa, charged with one count of fraudulent schemes and artifices, one count of illegally conducting an enterprise, one count of money laundering, two counts of smuggling of human beings and one count of conspiracy to commit smuggling of human beings.

Rosalba Pacheco, 39, of Phoenix, charged with one count of money laundering, one count of conspiracy to commit smuggling of human beings, two counts of smuggling of human beings and one count of illegally conducting an enterprise.

Irma Adriana Palacios, 43, of Mesa, charged with one count of illegally conducting an enterprise, one count of money laundering, one count of conspiracy to commit smuggling of human beings and one count of smuggling of human beings.

Angelica Rivas, 30, of Phoenix, charged with two counts of smuggling of human beings and one count of illegally conducting an enterprise.

Carmen Cortez, 38, of Phoenix, charged with two counts of smuggling of human beings and one count of illegally conducting an enterprise.

Rafael C. Ramirez, 50, of Phoenix, charged with one count of smuggling of human beings.

Angel S. Pavlevski, 34, of Phoenix, charged with one count of fraudulent schemes and artifices, two counts of illegally conducting an enterprise, one count of participating in a criminal syndicate, one count of money laundering, one count of conspiracy to commit smuggling of human beings and one count of smuggling of human beings.

Kostadin Kostadinov, 26, of Phoenix, charged with one count of fraudulent schemes and artifices, two counts of illegally conducting an enterprise, one count of participating in a criminal syndicate, one count of money laundering and one count of conspiracy to commit smuggling of human beings.

Martina Lisette Wittmann, a.k.a. Martina Gutterann, 45, of Chandler, charged with one count of fraudulent schemes and artifices, two counts of illegally conducting an enterprise, one count of participating in a criminal syndicate, one count of money laundering and one count of conspiracy to commit smuggling of human beings.

Zuli J. Ordonez Pena, a.k.a. Joanna, 21, of Phoenix, charged with one count of fraudulent schemes and artifices, two counts of illegally conducting an enterprise, one count of participating in a criminal syndicate, one count of money laundering, one count of conspiracy to commit smuggling of human beings and two counts of smuggling of human beings.

Elizabeth Navarrette, 20, of Phoenix, charged with two counts of smuggling of human beings and one count of illegally conducting an enterprise.

Edwin Castro, 42, of Avondale, charged with three counts of smuggling of human beings, one count of illegally conducting an enterprise, one count of fraudulent schemes and artifices and one count of money laundering.

The remaining two defendants, who allegedly operated the drop house, are not named because they have not yet been served with warrants.

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